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vo NEW departments with this issue:

Towards a New Humanity

Youth for a United World

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7 1985 VOLUME 24 JULY

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Sharry Silvi	**Editor**
Mary Cass	**Assistant Editor**
Anne Lingley	**Managing Editor**
Kim Rowley	**Art Director**
Joseph Klock *Patricia Dreveny* *Gail Giacobbe* *Daniel Jennings*	**Contributing Editors**
James and Kathy Webber	**Article Editors**
Vera Giannini	**Senior Copy Editor**
Richard Tetreau *Rosalyn Richardson Coleman*	**Copy Editors**
Longina Briones	**Assistant Art Director**
Maria Pereira	**Circulation Manager**
Rolf F. Rehe	**Art Consultant**

Participants from North America at the Genfest in Rome.

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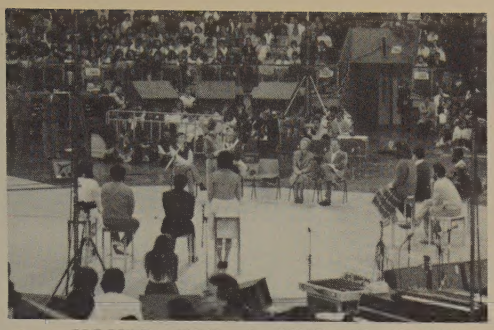
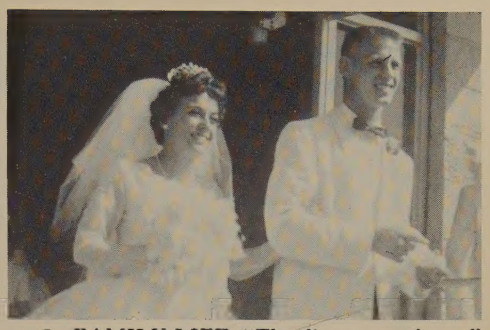
TOWARDS A NEW HUMANITY: A new department beginning with this issue, a collection of experiences that exemplify ways in which the spirituality of unity of the Focolare Movement has been put into practice in various fields of human endeavor.



14 *YOUTH FOR A UNITED WORLD: At the request of the youth of the Focolare Movement another new department is being inaugurated with this issue. In this issue, responses are given to the questions of young people all over the world on contemporary topics.*



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O OUR READERS

most of you know, our magazine wants to portray the efforts and ults of the spirituality of unity of the Focolare Movement put into ctice by the members who live it. It also wants to offer its readers developments as they occur. For this reason, a need arises, from e to time, for new departments which reflect this growth, and such eed has arisen now.

n recent issues we have published various articles which exempli- ways in which the spirituality has been put into practice in dif- nt fields of human endeavor: from education to business to art and on. All of this is a sign that the New Humanity Movement has wn. This Movement, which is an offshoot of the Focolare Movement , as its purpose, to incarnate in all expressions of human life the colare's Gospel-based ideal of unity. Its members are committed giving a Christian soul to our present-day society, contributing in s way to a renewal of both people and structures.

Ve feel that the moment has arrived to group together the experi- es in this area into one category. Therefore, with this issue a new tion, "Towards a New Humanity," is being inaugurated as a manent feature of the magazine. Dr. Daniel Jennings, who is nself a Volunteer in the Focolare Movement, will be the editor of s new department which will contain experiences at both a local an international level.

Dr. Jennings has worked for more than twenty years in the field of cial Work Education. He is presently the Dean of the Graduate hool of Social Work at the University of Houston from which posi- n he will be on leave of absence during the academic year 1985-86 in er to take up the position of delegate for "Caritas Internationalis" the United Nations in New York. Besides this impressive curricu- n vitae, however, Dan is an intelligent, kind, generous person, an friend of the Focolare.

And there is more good news! Genfest '85, covered in last month's ue, was a milestone for the youth movement of the Focolare. It rked a number of initiatives and brought to light the need for a um for dialogue for young people wherein they could investigate ir spiritual roots and share their activities. Therefore, a second new partment, "Youth for a United World" will also begin with this ue. These two new departments reflect the impact of the life of unity it penetrates and transforms all aspects of today's world.

Sharry Silvi

Sharry Silvi, Editor

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Unity and the Saints

by CHIARA LUBICH

We asked Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement, a movement animated by the "spirituality of unity", how the charisms which gave life to different religious families in the Church have emphasized or presently emphasize the Christian concept of unity.

I think that any authentic charism of the Holy Spirit cannot help but stress unity.

Although these various ways in the Church are almost never like ours, the end result is very often unity. It could not be otherwise. Unity may not be their ultimate aim, but, practically speaking, they accomplish it.

It is marvelous to read what the saints have said about unity. It makes us understand why the Church has approved the various movements that saints have founded and, therefore, the different charisms that have inspired them. They were ecclesial charisms. They served for the edification of unity, of the community, of the Church.

This is perceived in some saints of the XIII or XIV centuries such as St. Francis. We can take for example that episode when Jesus appeared in the midst of the friars.

It was at the very beginning of the Franciscan Movement, and St. Francis had asked one friar after another to speak with God. He then realized that it was the Holy Spirit speaking in them. This was confirmed by the fact that—and this is written in the *Little Flowers of St. Francis*—"As they were thus speaking, there appeared the Blessed Christ in their midst, under the appearance and form of a handsome youth. Blessing each of them, he filled them with so much grace and sweetness that they all went into ecstasy."[1] If Jesus was in their midst, we can conclude that their unity was perfect.

Thomas of Celano, in regard to the first Franciscan communities stated: "For holy simplicity had so filled them, innocence of life so instructed them, purity of heart so possessed them, that they knew nothing of duplicity of mind. For, as there was one faith in them, so was there unity of souls among them...."[2]

However, Thomas of Celano was even more explicit when he spoke of Clare of Assisi and the first Poor Clares: "... For above everything else there flourished among them that excelling virtue of mutual and continual charity which so binds their wills into one that, though forty or fifty of them dwell together in one place, agreement in likes and dislikes moulds one spirit."[3]

The life of St. Clare and of her first companions, which had poverty as its starting point, did achieve unity, the life of the Mystical Body of Christ, of the Church.

In the biography of St. Clare written by St. Thomas of Celano, we read that above all else what dominates among them is the virtue of constant mutual love. These words from the letter of St. Peter are fundamental in the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. They have had, and have, a very strong influence on the life of its members.

We read in St. Paul's letters that humility is necessary in order to have unity. This was one of our convictions right from the beginning of the Movement, and is still so now.

St. Angela of Foligno (1248-1309) held the same opinion. She lived in more or less the same epoch of St. Francis and St. Catherine of Siena.

She invited those who wish to build unity to become small: "Dear sons and daughters of my soul, what I desire for you ... is that you be united in thought, and that there be no divisions among you. In fact, I want you to have that strength which alone is able to achieve unity among hearts that are disunited, and this strength consists in knowing how to be small...."

"Dearest ones, I would feel more peaceful if I were to learn that having made yourselves small, you have become one heart, one body and one soul. How can you please God without this unity?"[4]

Another saint who speaks to us of unity is St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380).

"Love one another, love one another—she insisted—for you know that this is the sign that Christ left to his disciples, telling them that they would not be recognized as sons and daughters of God except by the unity of their brotherly love, living with one another in the most perfect charity."[5]

St. Catherine also considered mutual love as the distinguishing feature of the spouses of Christ: "Hence, love one another, love one another, love one another. By this they will see that you are spouses and daughters of Christ crucified."[6]

Moreover, Catherine denounced with the powerful expressions which are so typically hers, the lack of fraternal love. She recognized the damage it causes, the consequences it brings about, that is, hell in this life and in the next, the lack of any true virtue of which love is the source: "If you so not do this (if you do not love one another) you will give off a most contemptible stench: you will have a foretaste of hell in this life and in the end you will have the horrible vision of the devil. You have not come together in the community to be divided by hatred and rancor and to be disgusted with one another, but to live united and bound to one another by the bond of charity. Otherwise, you cannot be pleasing to God, nor can you possess any true virtue."[7]

To be continued

1) The Flowers of St. Frances, Ch. XIV; 2) "Vita Prima" by Thomas of Celano, in "o.c." 402; 3) "Vita Prima" by Thomas Celano in "Fonti Francescani", Assisi 1977, I, 352; 4) St. Angela of Foligno, "L'Esperienza di Dio Amore. Il 'Libro'," Rome 1972, p.233-234; 5) "Il messaggio di S. Caterina da Siena dottore della Chiesa" compiled by a Vincentian missionary, Rome, p.293-294; 6) Op.cit. p.985; 7) Op.cit. p.985.

LUMINOSA

by ANNAMARIA PERICOLI

"I will continue to play, without worrying about anything, living the present moment well." This was the masterpiece of Luminosa's life.

Luis showed us the photographs he had brought with him from Argentina. Some he had brought for us, so that we could see Luminosa as she was when she was a child. Others were for Luminosa—pictures of "el campo," her father's property, which he had bought because it reminded him of the land around the town in Italy from which he had emigrated many years before. By that time, however, the hardships of the early years in the "new world" were behind him, and he enjoyed prosperity and a respectable position in Buenos Aires society.

The land is located in the Navidad region of Argentina, it is several thousand acres of "pampa", where Luis and Luminosa spent a happy childhood of fun and adventure, horseback riding and driving the herds of cattle, just like the grownups.

It was also there in Navidad that grief struck Luminosa for the first time in her young life—the loss of her mother. Luminosa was only ten years old. Her aunt Maria and her father tried, with special love, to fill the emptiness. "To me, my father was also my mother, my brother, my friend—everything," she often said.

Luis was already a teenager and during the following years many things in his sister's life obviously escaped him. So when, at the age of eighteen, she burst out with the news that she had "met a Movement" and, soon afterwards, that the "focolare was her destiny and therefore she was going to leave everything and go to Italy," it came like a bolt out of the blue that crushed her father's dream to see her married to one of the prominent offspring of Buenos Aires' society.

The Focolare Movement had reached Argentina not long before; Luminosa had attended one of their gatherings and heard the focolarini speak about Mary, the Mother of God, about the various events of her life and her spiritual journey, "in an entirely new way."

"Even though I felt like a drop of water next to an ocean, I had the certainty that my vocation in life was, in a certain sense, to be like another little Mary. I was fascinated with this beautiful person who was so filled with God, yet immersed in the midst of humanity. I saw all my aspirations fulfilled in her. The Magnificat that she had proclaimed appeared to be such a powerful revolution. I,

1957: Luminosa with her brother Luis in Buenos Aires, during her fifteenth birthday celebration.

who had so often succumbed to the slavery of money, had finally found a real treasure."

It was not easy for Luminosa to leave her father whom she loved "more than anyone on earth," but she knew that God would reward this act of faith with the "hundredfold" of his love." The moment of her departure came, and as the boat was already moving away from the dock, her father finally gave her his blessing, shouting it from the pier. By then he was almost alone on the deserted pier and it was by mere chance that his daughter and her companions took another look back from the deck. He asked them to sing, loud and clear, to reassure Luminosa that he was truly happy with her choice.

Two years later, at Christmas, he was gravely ill with a heart ailment and asked Luminosa to come. When she arrived, however, his heart had already stopped. " It was a tremendous suffering," she said later, "but then I remembered that Jesus had reserved a place in his Kingdom for him since when He had asked for his daughter, he had given her to Him."

The name Luminosa had been given to her during a meeting in Grottaferrata, Italy because of the characteristically radiant expression she had as she was listening to Chiara Lubich speak about the presence of Jesus in the midst of those who live his commandment of mutual love. This presence is the norm of norms for the focolarini, the most important rule of all. To live this mutual love is, in fact, the pact that begins every single day in the life of the focolarini.

"This name actually belongs to Mary," Luminosa wrote to Chiara. "I see her as the truly 'luminous one' because throughout her life she knew how to die to herself in order to let God live within her."

During her twenty years in the Movement—living in Argentina, Italy, Uruguay and Spain—she certainly displayed this capacity "to live on light." She gave of herself with all the exuberance of her personality, with her intelligence and with her untiring love for each neighbor, with her ability to start each day with the same fresh enthusiasm as she had at the beginning. This way of hers was certainly contagious; thousands of people, in fact, felt its effects.

Last September, when the rare lung disease she had been afflicted with for four years had grown extremely serious, and there seemed to be no hope of a cure, Luis, her brother and childhood companion, also left "el campo" and his successful cattle breeding business to be with Luminosa. His visits often consisted of long, silent hours at her bedside. She wanted to soften the blow of her imminent departure by assuring him that it wasn't a final goodbye at all, that death was not at all what most people think. "Death doesn't exist, it is only a door: it is our chance to see Jesus face to face. It is the door we go through to get to where we want to go." She had heard it from Chiara, and she treated this enormous experience as an ordinary, everyday event, a talent to make use of for the sake of her neighbor. In the last months of her life, Luis encountered God once more, God whom, as he confessed with simplicity, he had neglected for many years.

Maria Teresa, also from Buenos Aires and Luminosa's companion in South America and Spain, often acted as interpreter in our conversations with Luis. "How many things I'll learn about my sister," he said, "things I never knew before..." ►

Recalling the beginning of the Movement in Buenos Aires, Maria Teresa remembered the many difficulties to overcome at the onset. I used to meet with a group of girls who were all interested in living the life of unity of the focolare. There were difficulties to overcome in finding work; we were also anxious to get a magazine underway to keep all the young people in contact. Luminosa noticed that I was getting a little overwhelmed by the amount of work. One Sunday she asked me to go out with her. We took an old car and toured Buenos Aires. I had just gotten my license and once in a while she would lean out the window and signal the traffic to stop for us. We laughed so much. Later, we stopped at a bakery and went in for some cake. We were like two children. It was all very simple and I felt her love, the love of a sister.

"Then we met again in Montevideo—what a welcome she gave me when I arrived. There, too the situation was tough and there were plenty of difficulties in store for us. Once we made a plan to visit every parish group—young people, families, everyone. Luminosa chose for herself the difficult contacts without overlooking even one.

"Then there was the moment when the construction of different centers of the Movement was underway. We thought of a thousand different ways of helping out with the expenses, such as baking and selling small cakes in schools, on street corners and on the beaches. Luminosa was always ahead of us all, carrying her basket filled with little cakes. She was teaching history at that time in one of the most exclusive schools in the country, and many of her students were at the beach and saw her selling the cakes. At one point she stopped under the hot sun, looked at me and said: "Teresa, let's renew our pact to keep Jesus always in our midst." I felt that this was one of the occasions when these words had a particularly profound meaning for me.

"Once in Montevideo we had a girl staying with us for a while. She was extremely afraid and wouldn't sleep unless all the doors and windows were locked. Lumi was the only one who could sleep in the same room with her in that terrible summer heat. 'How can you stand it?' I asked her one day. And I realized, as I did also on many other occasions, that without any fuss she was loving with that measure of being ready even to give her life for the other."

Many people told us of similar experiences with Luminosa. Letters have arrived from Spain and from so many parts of Europe where Luminosa spent time for medical tests.

For thirteen years, since 1971, Luminosa had been responsible for the women's branch of the Movement in Spain. She traveled the country from Andalusia to Catalonia, from the Basque countries to the Canary Islands, visiting cities and towns, even the tiniest villages and then continuing the contacts by letter which meant keeping up with a mountain of correspondence.

In December 1980 she returned from a stay at the headquarters of the Movement in Rocca di Papa, Italy to the focolare community of Madrid. She was radiant with the news she was bringing: "Chiara told us that 1981 must be a decisive year in our thrust towards reaching the sanctity we are all called to as Christians." It was the beginning of what would be called the "holy journey," a commitment to become 'perfect in love,' day after day. Luminosa threw herself into it with the enthusiasm of someone who wants to get there as fast as possible. Every morning she used to say, "Let's start anew." One of her methods was to count the days ahead of her. We find it in many of her letters: "We have thirty-two days until the end of 1981, the 'decisive' year, remember? Whenever I feel like I'm slowing down, it is enough for me to remember that I am on the journey with everybody else, and that gives me the courage and determination to speed up and put more fire into it. So now I have thirty-two days left to turn up the speed to the maximum."

"It is in unity that we find our sanctification," she wrote on another occasion. "It's not a matter of individual sanctity, but to reach it together. Christ in our midst is the Saint: we are like logs that burn and are consumed so that his presence may blaze forth as Chiara has often told us. Keep this motto

One of the most recent photos of Luminosa Bavosi.

in mind: 'Always, immediately and with joy'."

Joy was another of Luminosa's characteristics and she found it also in giving it to others. In preparing a party for the parents of many Spanish focolarine, for instance, she said: "They must experience the hundredfold of God's love, even in sons and daughters, for having given Him one." She was also optimistic. She believed so strongly in the potential of others that they would ultimately believe it,too.

Then, last September, it seemed she had very little time left to live. She was staying in Rocca di Papa. Chiara wanted to prepare her for the passage, and during a visit she asked Luminosa whether she was aware of the seriousness of her illness. She replied, "Please tell me what you think because I don't know if I'm ready or not." Later she told us, almost as if she had been surprised by an unexpected gift, "Chiara told me that I was more than ready. She reminded me of the story of St. Louis when he was a little boy. One day, when he was playing, someone approached him and asked what he would do if he were to be told that he ►

would soon die. The boy replied: 'I would go on playing'. That's what I must do, too,' Luminosa said, "because by nature I like to play. So I'll go on playing without worrying about anything, living the present moment well, and also trying not to get too tired. I also want to pray with faith for my recovery. I know this would give Chiara great joy."

At another time Luminosa wrote, "I'm infinitely grateful to Our Lady for preparing me in this way to meet my Spouse."

So Luminosa went on living a "normal" life. The physical limitations became more pressing every day, however. It was a major effort to move from the bed to the armchair, or to get dressed—something she insisted on doing very carefully in order to receive her relatives and visitors well.

"This is my life, this is what I must do well." Every time Chiara went to see her, assuring her that "we are doing everything together," Luminosa would ask, "I should continue to play, right?" At one time when the topic was revolving around the future, Chiara asked her, "Did they tell you whether you'll have much pain?" And Luminosa answered, "I didn't even ask, because I wanted to be in the present moment. You told me not to worry about anything."

She went through various crises which seemed to be decisive, but she came out of each of them. She kept on "playing", whether she was feeling very ill or feeling better. "Who knows what Jesus wanted with all these dramatics," she commented after a terrible night in which she seemed close to death and then overcame the crisis.

She did all her part in order to get well, she wanted so much to give us this gift. But once in a while she would say, "I wonder what it's like in Paradise. Well, we'll wait and see."

A Spanish friend who came to see her left afterwards with the words "salgas adelante", which means, "I hope you make it out of this situation." Luminosa promptly replied, "Of course I'll make it out of this. I don't know how, but God will certainly get me out of here." Often she was at the end of her strength, yet she never complained. On the contrary, she visited with her brothers, her sister-in-law, her niece, showing interest in everything they did, as though she had no problems of her own at all.

During a short period of remission her brother Luis left for Argentina, but soon returned. She called him to her bedside and told him, "It is only a matter of traveling through a passageway. First you're here and then you're there, but this step must be taken very well. We must prepare for it with our life."

For some time, Chiara had been sending messages to Luminosa daily, reminding her that "we are doing everything together." Luminosa kept these very close by so that she could read them over and over.

Then the situation became extremely serious and she had to be rushed to the hospital. Chiara sent her a message: "Accept God's plan for you, whatever it may be... and greet Our Lady for me when you see her." These were extremely important words for Luminosa since she had tried to do everything in her power to stay alive. We had the impression she found a new peace in hearing these words, in accepting God's call to a new step. Then came the last night. The monitor by her bed showed that her heart was stopping. It was as if a moment of rest had come after a long and fierce struggle. Hardly able to breath, Luminosa then began to speak through the oxygen mask, as though to tell us what was happening to her. "Gis," she said, "I go on playing... The unity of our Movement... Can you follow me? Am I right? I speak of unity so that you may live it. I am praying for this... I entrust everything to God. I did everything before him. Of course I feel that I cannot go on like this... I'm happy."

She left us with a smile, as luminous as ever. □

> *"Death doesn't exist, it is only a door: it is our chance to see Jesus face to face. It is the door we go through to get to where we want to go."*

New People for a New World

The following are experiences of life of members of the New Humanity Movement from different countries involved in various fields of human endeavor.

Economy and work

A small step ahead

My job entails unloading trucks and taking inventory of the merchandise received. When I started the job I realized the work atmosphere was very fast paced and tension rose easily. Decisions on work assignments were made very quickly. It seemed that it was difficult to take the time to consider the complete picture of the various situations that each day brought about.

As a Christian I knew the importance of building an authentic relationship with those with whom I come in contact. For instance, when I realized that decisions made for the good of one department may cause an inconvenience to another, I would try to take the time to approach someone from both departments to work out a solution that was suitable for both sides.

One day, as my colleagues and I were reading the newspaper during our break, we ran across an article about a boy who needed an expensive operation. My boss immediately suggested that maybe we could raise some money. Initially I felt awkward because I had never done anything like that before. But I realized that this was another chance for me to take the time to see things from another's point of view. I encouraged her to get permission from the manager for this project, and then we looked around for boxes and made some signs. Within a few weeks we raised nearly $1,000 from customer and employee contributions, but also rewarding was the experience of working together to make it possible.

For a while, I was in charge of one of the departments. One day I noticed that one of my colleagues was not producing much work. I felt the burden of this since there was much work to be done. Yet I felt I had to see the complete picture, to see life from his point of view. A few days went by but the situation didn't change. I realized that he hadn't been taking his car to work that week so I offered him a ride home. For the next week I took him home each night. While driving home, he told me that he was going through one the most difficult moments of his life. His wife wanted a separation and he didn't know how long it could last. I tried to listen well to ►

allow him to tell me whatever was on his mind. His wife was allowing him to visit the children. I felt I could make one little suggestion on how he could treat his wife during these visits. Each night he would tell me how things were going. After about two weeks he joyfully told me that they had been reunited. His work greatly improved and he was even concerned about my own work, reminding me of the things I needed to do during the day.

On another occasion I realized that one of the workers was having trouble keeping up with his bills and therefore wasn't eating. I didn't know him well but I offered to help a bit. I began to bring in some extra sandwiches and fruit each day. Little by little we began to talk about many things, including some budget planning. Friends gave me a bag of clothing for his baby, and he appreciated this very much.

On a few occasions he missed work without notifying the company. During my lunch hour on one of these days I asked someone to drive me to his apartment so that I could see if there was a problem that I could help with and find out what the situation was so that I could clear up some doubts concerning his absency. I found out that he had no phone, and on both occasions it was difficult for him to call in because his daughter was ill and he couldn't leave her. My manager was worried about being able to keep him on the job and wanted to know what I thought. I was able to explain things to her and she responded by bringing in a bag of groceries the following day.

Circumstances led us to talk about our relationship with God. He hadn't been to church since he was a small child. One day he told me that someone had done something wrong to him the previous evening that had upset him very much. However, thinking of the words of the "Our Father" — "...forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us..." — he said he had been able to make the effort to forgive. On another occasion he noticed that I was angry about something, and that I wasn't able to let go of it. He approached me to ask if everything was all right. Seeing his concern helped me to overcome my anger. In these ways he was helping me live my day as a Christian.

A few months have passed and I still prepare extra sandwiches in the morning. We are still trying to work things out, but beyond this, it is an experience that has given me a lot of joy, that is, to find through my own suffering, and sharing in the sufferings of others, a deeper relationship with God and with my co-workers. I feel that we've taken a small step towards accomplishing unity in our working place. **R.J.**

Education

From protest to unity

"Whatever you want us to do we'll do it." These were my students' very words when the news of my transferral broke out. It was a strange happening of events. An Italian teacher was to be transferred from of our high schools to another. "But this won't effect me," I thought. I teach mostly French, not Italian.

Suddenly, without warning, parents and students stormed the Board meeting, protesting the removal of the other teacher. Things were very tense. Threats, shouting, pamphlets and so on, and just about every other kind of protest was springing up at the meeting. Teacher was against teacher, parent against parent, student against student. Our principal was right in the middle, as well as our supervisor. Then it happened. My principal called me into his office and the bomb exploded. He told me the Board was in a bind because of all the fuss the people were making over the other teacher's removal. They would have to reverse their decision and allow him to stay. However, someone would have to go. My principal looked at me sadly and said, "You are going to be the one." I assured him that I would go, regardless of how hard it would be for me. I also assured him that no repercussions would come about from this new decision.

The next day I was approached by all as soon as the news hit: "French Teacher Goes, Italian Teacher Stays." Teachers all

over the school were furious; parents called saying it was now their turn to go to the Board of Education and protest. The most angry of all were my students. "What can we do for you?" they asked. "We'll protest, get petitions signed, write letters, whatever you want!" I was so upset myself in this moment that I almost forgot my promise to the principal and I was quite tempted to take advantage of the situation to get my way and stay. But I was suddenly hit with a thought: I have tried to live a life of unity for almost twenty years now. And I have always tried to put peace where there was none. Why stop now? Why let something like this—as difficult as it was—change me or take me away from my one aim in life. And if there was a place that needed unity in this moment, it was certainly my school. So I told my students, "We have a small war going on here. I think it is going to have to be us to put an end to it and see that peace returns."

Together we showed the entire school that what was more important to us was peace. Seeing that all chaos had been avoided through this new decision, my superintendent called me in to thank me for being so understanding. My supervisor and the principal also approached me during the week to thank me for all that I had done.

It was a deep experience for me; a confirmation that when I try to be a small expression of God's infinite love for those around me, barriers crumble and we become more similar to a family where mutual respect and concern reign. G.G.

"Social progress is the fruit of religious awareness, which makes us see in man our brother: indeed Christ himself....

"Co-existence—so to speak—with God generates collaboration with him.

"Existence in fact develops rationally if it becomes a collaboration with him who is God. This is an idea which, by itself, produces ecstasy: a God who treats us as collaborators, so that our activity, our words, writings, walls, laws, merchandise, art and science, technology and economics and politics are a participation in the work of building the edifice which the Creator untiringly constructs: a collaboration in bringing order into the universe, which, if it suffers from a disorder, suffers the loss of the freedom that was allowed us."

IGINO GIORDANI
from the book Diary of Fire
published by New City Press

Politics

The Mayor

I have always been interested in all that concerns society and the common good, but only when I met the spirituality of the Focolare Movement did I feel the courage to take an active position in this field. From that moment on I can say that my life has radically changed. I experienced the transforming power of Jesus' presence as in Mt. 18:20: "Where two or more are gathered in my name I am there in their midst." And I asked myself: "Why not in the midst of politicians? Would this be the way to bring about Christianity in that environment?

Believing that God was calling me to give witness to him in the field of politics, my interest in political affairs had its start. I became a representative in the town government. I tried to use my position to serve the people and, some years later, at the insistence of many, I presented myself as a candidate for mayor of the city.

I started the electoral campaign in a climate of peace, trying not to take a particularly hard stand against my opponents. I wished only to be an instrument in God's hands. The goal of my compaign was to build a sense of brotherhood with people and to work with them for social progress. For this reason, instead of beginning the campaign in the city, I preferred to make my initial contacts with the unassuming poor of the rural areas. I spent hours and hours with them sit- ►

ting under the shade of the trees. I listened to their difficulties, became more aware of their problems, and helped them with their most pressing needs.

A sentence of the Gospel helped me to go on being faithful to my purpose, "Be careful not to parade your good deeds before men to attract their notice; by doing this you will lose all reward from your Father in Heaven" (Mt. 6:1). In the measure I tried to put it into practice, I understood its meaning more and more. I felt a deep sense of freedom I never experienced before.

My brother was supporting my electoral campaign even though our ideas coincided with mine only to a certain point. He couldn't understand, for instance, why I was helping people who certainly would not vote for me, and he didn't agree with my attitude of not just pleading for votes. He didn't want to waste his time with my novel way of doing politics. So, it was clear to me that, first of all, I should, "Set your hearts on his kingdom first," as Jesus said, "and all these other things will be given you as well."

Meanwhile I took advantage of my position as Alderwoman in order to lead the people to work for the common good and to take political action. I wanted to emphasize the right that all people have to participate in their own progress, Living in close contact with the people, I could identify the cause of many of the sorrowful situations in which they were involved.

I was elected! As mayor of the city I tried to put into practice my administrative program. My first step was to look closely at the various departments: education, health, and social affairs, trying to determine the assistance required to meet the needs of the people and promote social progress. Working in this way we succeeded in: repairing and maintaining the schools in the city and building some others in the rural zone, starting courses of basic reading instruction for adults, opening a library, starting one health center in the city and five in the rural zones (in an attempt to prevent the exodus of people from the fields to the city), opening new roads or repairing those already existing.

One of my main concerns was the youth. There was a group of young men who used to sing the 'serenades' (a common custom in our cities) and with this excuse would end the night drunk, provoking disorders and causing accidents. I knew that by force I would accomplish nothing. I thought of a sentence of Saint Paul: "For the weak I made myself weak. I made myself all things to all men in order to save some at any cost (1 Cor. 9:22). So I

United Nations

"If the problem is ours why don't we start ourselves by each making a contribution.... With the amount collected in my area it was possible to support sixty families who lived in poverty. Later on, new laws were passed enabling us to give work to more than two hundred people thereby relieving many of the poorest families."

decided to put into action my talent for music in order to make myself one with that group.

I started to meet and play with them. We became friends and I offered to teach them new music and rhythms. Little by little the night activities were changing. The 'serenades' continued but they were now dedicated to the people who were suffering or had great preoccupations. At the end of these 'serenades' each one would go home happy for having given a bit of joy to those people. On some of those occasions I was able to tell them about the 'true ideal' that animated my life. Some of them, interested in it, attended one of the summer gatherings of the Movement, the Mariapolis, and later on involved themselves in other activities at the service of the community.

My desire to live according to the Gospel, and the support I received from the Focolare Movement of which I am a member, gave me the strength to resist the strong pressure I felt from the higher branches of the government. For example, one day I received an order to start the distribution of birth control pills in local health centers in an effort to resolve family and social problems. Knowing the thought of the Church in these matters, and aware of my duties as mayor, I did a thorough study of the Constitution of the country and there I found the citations that permitted me to impede the application of the law. To further support this move I made use of the statistics collected during the electoral campaign which affirmed the physical damage caused to women by the use of birth control pills.

For this action I received many threats and heated criticism, especially from the woman doctor who had been appointed by the state to carry out this project. She defined my attitude as "ultra conservative" and "against the common good." With calm, but without bending my decision, I explained to her my position as a citizen and as a Christian who has witnessed the effects of the Gospel lived in the family. I could explain to her my belief in the good existing in

(Continued on page 28)

Changing our perspective

"Youth for a United World" will start as a new department with this issue of **Living City** *with a series of questions on different contemporary topics that young people all over the world prepared on the occasion of Genfest '85. The responses were given during that event.*

Unity, not uniformity

Question: Sometimes people say that the desire to achieve unity can lead to uniformity, wherein individuals lose their own personality and their own characteristics. At the level of the unity of peoples, they say, traditional cultures, ethnic minorities and so on might be sacrificed and lost. How can we bring about unity, a united world while still giving the proper value to the special gift of each individual, of the different nations and their different cultures?

A group of young people from Spain

Answer: Before anything else, we should be able to completely change our perspective, and this, in itself, is a cultural revolution. We cannot look at the individual nations and try to bring about unity among them one by one. Instead we must consider humanity, with an intelligence enlightened by love, as one family, wherein all are one, and from this perspective, again with an intelligence enlightened by love, look at all the individual nations.

How can we accomplish unity without absorbing the nations into a collectivity, without flattening out their own characteristics? It will be possible to do this if we see all individuals and peoples as children of one Father, that is, children of God. This is the fundamental reality that comes before the differences which are not necessarily a cause for contrast. In fact, they can be a source of mutual enrichment.

Returning to your question, we must understand very well what it means to "accomplish unity," keeping in mind that unity is something that is always dynamic; it always looks to the future, it is constantly changing and evolving to become always greater and better.

Let's imagine two entities, two people for example who seek unity and think (mistakingly) that it can be achieved if one of the two remains motionless, closed off in itself while the other moves towards it. In an example such as this, there will never be unity. If one entity opens itself up and the other does not, there is no unity. There is only alienation; one reality (in this case the one that moves towards the other) is taken into the other. This is true also among nations. If there is no mutual self giving, there is no unity. The result will be that one nation is consumed by the other.

The true search for unity, therefore, demands that each, let's say, person, moves towards the other, so that unity is the encounter of two people, who are no longer living only within and for themselves. In this way neither one dominates the other, or imposes on the other. The reason that each person (party, nation, group) is asked to give everything of him or herself is to make the encounter with the other, who is also giving everything, a genuine encounter. In it both sides rediscover the very gift they are sharing. We speak of rediscovery because what is shared is enriched by the act of mutual giving.

God who is Love teaches us how to do it if we want to learn. Through Jesus he showed us the way to achieve it: "Love one another as I (Jesus) have loved you." Jesus, we know, gave everything of himself for us. Therefore, in following him with his boundless love, not only as individuals, but also as nations, we learn, as Chiara Lubich has said, how to love the nation of the other as we love our own. With this at the basis we can work for unity among nations.

One thing is certain: today either peoples unite, seeking those way and means that bring about unity, or we will all meet our end.

Genfest '85, 25,000 young people from all over the world participated in this event which was held in March in the Sports Arena in Rome.

Let us learn, therefore, to love the nation of the other as we love our own.

Arnaldo Diana

Finding a new language

Question: Very often we find it difficult to be truly understood as Christians, in our native land, our village, our families, where only the African culture exists and where our language is often too poor to express the very high realities contained in Christianity.

Often we feel unable to find the way to tell others around us about Christian life.

What would you suggest that we do in order to be true witnesses to the faith in this situation?

Youth from Africa

Answer: Your question calls upon all of us to share a very real difficulty that many Christians today have, not only you.

In other situations as well this problem is very strongly felt. It it difficult, for instance, to find the right language to pass on the Christian message to the working masses of our industrialized society. Think how difficult it is, for example, to speak to persons who are dominated by a secular or atheistic mentality. Think of the many young people who are desperate and lonely, manipulated by a false vision of a better world.

What words could be used then to offer the message of the Gospel to the poor of Latin America?

As for you, how can you recount the Gospel with words taken from your own cultures, according to your way of thinking, your customs which are so different from those of the European world for example?

What can be done?

We believe that Jesus is the Word of God. Let's ask ourselves—is it possible that he would not know how to find ways to speak to the people of today, people living in very diverse situations, to your people, to your families?

These difficulties urge us to make a deeper discovery of that language which is universal and understandable by all—the life that comes from living the Gospel,

Those new words, that those of you in Africa feel a need for, will arise then from your very life. They will come about through Jesus present among Christians who love one another. Jesus will be there present among you; your language and culture will become his. Jesus in your midst, and present within each of you, will, as only he can do, announce the Good News with words that your people will feel are theirs. Guided by the Holy Spirit and following the example of Jesus who often spoke in parables, as it was customary at his time, you will be able to find "new" parables, a new language to repeat the Gospel in a way that is close to your people's heart.

You will then discover that even your culture, which you place at Jesus' service, can welcome and express the great realities of Christian life.

Silvana Veronesi

The discovery of an all-committing cause

Compiled by MARY CASS

JoAnn: I am the oldest of four girls. I went to a parochial school all through high school. When I finished high school I had no other aspiration but to get married and have children —that was my dream.

Tom: I come from a small family—my mother and father and one brother. My grandmother and grandfather lived with us until he died. So we had an extended family in the same house. Throughout public school, I hardly ever opened a book. I never took life too seriously during those years. My big concern was having a good time; I certainly had no thought of marriage. Even my attendance at college lasted briefly, I was more of a "socialite" than a student. In fact, I dropped out after my first year.

It's kind of humorous to think of how I met JoAnn. It's been said that our relationship was founded on a lie. I had joined the Sid Sellhost Water Ski and Thrill Show, with a whole group of fellows that I knew. We were going to a training session for the ski troup, and one of my friends wanted to introduce me to his ex-girlfriend, that happened to be JoAnn.

We went to see a movie that night on skiing and I made it a point to sit next to her. I had made arrangements with another girl that night to take her home from the show. She was sitting on the other side of me. Sometime during the movie, JoAnn received a phone call from her mother. She returned with a very worried look on her face. I asked her if something was wrong. She said, "Yes, my mother can't pick me up because she had two flat tires on her car." Of course, I felt very sorry for her and immediately volunteered to take her home. She replied, "Oh no, that will be out of your way if you have to take the other girl home as well." I said, "No, it's right on my way."

JoAnn: When Tom came in, I was immediately attracted to him. He was good looking and had a real presence about him that made you want to go up to him and meet him. Throughout the show, I was trying to figure out how to do this when my mother called. (She had really called to see if I needed a ride home.) I boldly told her that she didn't have to bother because I had met a nice young man who had gallantly offered to bring me home. When I returned to my seat I found the perfect excuse right on my lips—a flat tire!

Tom: I was impressed by JoAnn and although I wanted to take her out, I didn't want to appear over anxious. However, that night was the beginning of a beautiful courtship. By this time we were both an active part of the ski show and were travelling all over the midwest with the team.

JoAnn: For me it was all very adventurous. Tom had started water skiing when he was thirteen years old, but I had never done it before. I didn't even know how to swim. In a beauty contest I had won, as a prize, waterskiing lessons. I had put everything into it and learned very fast. Since I had experience as a ballet dancer, they decided that I could be part of a doubles act on skis. Together with the other members of the team we would do one trick

Tom and JoAnn's wedding day.

after another—holding onto the rope with our feet while doing all kinds of hand formations. I would be flipped out of my skis by my partner and onto his shoulders. We were among the first to do six-person pyramids and doubles acts over the jump. The conclusion of the act was an enormous leap over an eight-foot jump. The dangerous part came when we had to do the same routine in pitch darkness. There was a spotlight for the people on the shore but we couldn't see a thing. We really could have been killed at any moment.

We were part of that youth that fears nothing and is willing to try everything. The excitement and thrill of it far surpassed any fear. It was also exciting because we got to travel and meet a lot of people. It didn't matter to us that we didn't get paid. We worked hard—doing a lot of manual labor—painting, waxing the skis and jumps and practicing for hours and hours. The fun of it made everything worthwhile.

Tom: I was a jumper in the show and flew the kite. I would hold onto the kite going over the jump and fly about 80 feet in the air. I also did a clown act that was a lot of fun.

By the summer of 1960, my interest in JoAnn was growing. By September the show was over and she proposed to me.

JoAnn: I did not!

Tom: On Christmas day, 1960, I gave her an engagement ring; we were married the following September.

JoAnn: The only person who was really for us getting married was my grandmother. My parents, though they liked Tom, were concerned about our youthfulness. Now, I understand their concern, but at that time it made no sense to me. They tried everything to get me to go back to school, but I had made up my mind. I was eighteen. My grandmother was ready to go to bat for us. She helped my mom and dad feel more comfortable with the idea of our marriage at such a young age. I had no desire to do anything else in life.

As the date of our marriage came closer, the topic of religion came up. I was Catholic, Tom was not. While growing up my relationship with God meant a lot to me. Being Catholic was very important to me and parish community was a very intimate part of my life.

Tom: I was raised a Protestant. All through my early childhood until the time I was seventeen I was at church every week from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. My parents saw religion as very important for me, although they rarely attended themselves. The pastor and many of the congregation were encouraging me to go to the seminary to become a minister.

One Sunday, when I was about seventeen years old, I asked myself, "If this is such a great thing (going to Church), why isn't the rest of my family coming with me?" After asking myself this I deliberately walked past the church and into a drug store to play the pinball machines. It worried me because I was really turning my back on God. I remained far from God for the next couple of years.

Then I met JoAnn. Although I had never given any thought ►

to marriage, I did feel that if two people were married then they should be close in terms of their faith as well. When we started talking about marriage I started to go to church again with JoAnn. I saw a strength in the way JoAnn worshipped, and in the convictions she had, that I longed to have myself. God became very important for me.

I was very immature at this time, and really had no idea of what a marriage should be. It was logical that we would have to go through some real struggles in our marriage. It got so bad that we even began to talk of breaking up. However, as immature as I was, I knew deep down that when I had said "I do," I had taken a permanent commitment.

Our real difficulties, however, started in our seventh year of married life.

JoAnn: It was the time of the Peace Movement and the Vietnam War. I had come into marriage wanting to do my best as a wife and mother, caring very little about all that was going on around me. Tom entered marriage with just the opposite attitude: involvement with the world outside came first, the concerns of the family second. So when he met people who shared his ideas, off he went, from demonstration to demonstration. In the eyes of all our friends, my interest in being a good mother and wife was fruitless when there were so many ills in the outside world. It was a constant struggle and I felt quite alone in raising the kids. I knew that God existed but I no longer felt him close to me.

Tom: I was just a bandwagon person. I've always wanted to make some social impact with my life; to have an effect on the problems of poverty, or starvation, or immorality. So when the Civil Rights Movement came out I joined it, I was picketing for the cause. When Vietnam came along, I was out picketing against the Selective Service System, and so on. I would jump from one cause to the next. In looking back, I was really searching for an ideal, for something that could really have an effect on the world.

JoAnn: During this time, there were more things that we disagreed on than agreed on. We were totally opposite. Moreover, what Tom was doing worried me because it could have landed him in jail at any moment; then I would really have been alone. I was full of fear and didn't know which way to turn.

Then, Tom was offered the possibility of returning to college to complete his degree. This was our chance to move to another city in Illinois, and change environment. We packed up our family, rented our house, sold everything we could and left.

This was the beginning of two very good years. For the first time we were working together for a common purpose —a new future for our family. It was one for which we had to do all our part. We had very little money and very little time to ourselves so our moments together as a family seemed more precious than ever.

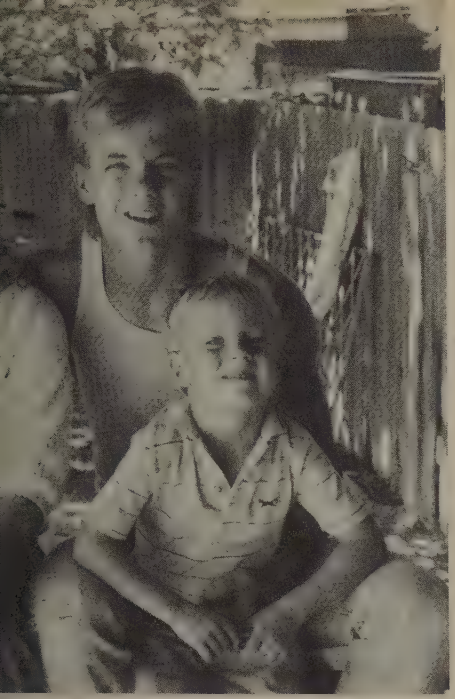
Then came Tom's graduation. This meant leaving the college.

Tom and JoAnn's five children: from the left, Elizabeth on Joe's knee, Kim (center) and Chris holding Matthew.

Where would we go next? We looked at our family situation. We had one child who suffered quite a bit with asthma. For this reason, although we knew no one there, we decided to move to Arizona. Off again! We packed up everything we owned in a big truck, said good-bye to our family (who were devastated at this point) and left on the 1700 mile trip for a totally unknown spot. This time we were going with a deep longing to start again.

Tom: When we left Illinois, one of my dreams was to move into a community of some kind. It was in order to be a sign of opposition to the establishment. In fact, my motivation for going back to school to become a teacher was to serve this community and teach the children my ideas.

JoAnn: Tucson seemed to be truly where God wanted us to be. We found jobs and a house immediately. We met some wonderful people and we began to review our relationship with God. For the first time we felt



that we wanted to make him an integral part of our life.

One day a couple for whom we had a great respect called us up. They told us that they had something exciting and beautiful to tell us. We went over to their house that very evening and listened attentively as they told us about the Focolare Movement. We were really struck. My first thought was, "This is something I can start doing right now... right where I am." There was no need to do a lot of outside activities, I could also start living what I heard in my daily life with my family. We were fascinated by this new way of life which was one of unity.

Tom: Through other organizations in the Church, I was beginning to rediscover family life and the meaning of the sacrament of matrimony.

When I met the Movement and I heard about putting the Gospel into practice in my daily life, I felt right away that this was the ideal I had been searching for. I understood that living the Gospel and taking Christ's priestly prayer for unity seriously was a far greater cause than I had ever been involved in before. If any impact was to be made on the world around me I knew that it would be through Jesus' words. As important and noble as my previous causes were, my involvement in them had often created disunity.

JoAnn: Up to the moment when I met the Movement, I had felt that my children were solely mine. With my new understanding of the love of God, I discovered that my children, like everything else, were also a gift from God and should not be used for me but be raised to give him glory. I began to try and love them without expecting anything in return, trying to see them new everyday as God sees them. Little by little this began to bring about a wonderful change in our family.

Tom: Prior to meeting the Focolare, I saw my responsibility as a husband and father consisting in forcing the whole family to be involved in whatever I thought was good for them. Dragging my kids with me into all kinds of activities, whether they wanted to go or not, created a great deal of conflict. Everything became "mom's or dad's thing" and they immediately began to resist. When I met the Movement I understood that I had to be an example with my life by making a serious commitment to live the Gospel. I'm beginning to experience the fruits of this life, particularly with the last three of our kids who are still at home. Our older son is beginning to open up and share much more.

JoAnn: Now, when a suffering comes to our family, we feel that also this is an expression of God's love for us and we can find and love him there in that misunderstanding, discord or unforseen event. When we do it, we discover that it is his love that governs everything—that he is the center of our family!

I think that we have realized that before we were working to make our kids "successful" and well-behaved at any cost. We now have come to understand that the most precious gift we could give our children each day is the presence of Jesus among us through the mutual love that we share (cf. Mt. 18:20). Then it's Jesus who works. We're just kind of his ambassadors.

Tom: The kids were right; I was trying to impose "my thing," even the new life that I had discovered, on them. Now, as JoAnn said, it's a matter of living in unity through our love for one another and he is certainly changing things in our family and around us as well!

JoAnn: We have opened our home to young people who visit us often to share their burdens and problems with us, and to families, many of whom are facing some of the same problems we were. We have discovered that this life of unity is a treasure that can be shared with everyone and really provides the solution to personal and family problems.

Tom: I guess it's our small way of giving a contribution to a far greater and all-committing cause—Jesus' prayer, "that all may be one." □

WORD OF LIFE

"I, the prisoner in the Lord, implore you therefore to lead a life worthy of your vocation. Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together."

(Eph. 4:1-3)

The word makes us live.

The word makes us free.

The word guarantees happiness.

The word converts.

The word purifies us.

The word draws us to our specific vocations.

The word brings forth the hatred of the world and the sanctity of the disciple.

The word makes us see the truth.

The word brings comfort.

The word gives us joy.

The word produces works.

The word gives wisdom.

The word preserves us from human concerns.

The word obtains everything.

The word brings about union with God.

The word gives us hope of eternal life.

The word makes us one.

The word changes one's mentality.

The word makes each soul a heaven.

These words of Paul, written from prison to the Christians of Asia Minor, burst forth from the impassioned heart of the apostle. With these words he calls the brethren to live their lives in conformity with the ideal to which they were called: unity, which is more important than anything else for the followers of Jesus. Paul is referring to the unity of all persons in love and peace which, according to him, sums up all the fruits of the redemption. In fact, by his death on the cross, Jesus broke down all the barriers that divided and caused enmity among people (cf. Eph. 2:13-15). In so doing he formed a new people of all those who believe in him, have God as their Father, Jesus as their Lord and Master, and the Holy Spirit as their lifegiving source (cf. Eph. 4:4-6).

"I, the prisoner in the Lord, implore you therefore to lead a life worthy of your vocation. Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together."

If unity is so important for Christians, nothing goes against their vocation as much as a weakening in it. And we falter in unity every time we give in to the temptation, which continually crops up, to act individually, living our lives our own way without regard to others, letting ourselves be guided only by our judgment, by self interest and a desire for personal prestige without considering other people, in fact, disregarding their needs and rights. It is because of individualism that divisions, jealousies, dissension, big and small wars, break out.

"I, the prisoner in the Lord, implore you therefore to lead a life worthy of your vocation. Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together."

We should build unity, therefore, or better, safeguard the unity that Jesus already brought about. Instead, divisions existing among Christians in every field, too often break it, obscure it and paralyze its progress.

The Church is undoubtedly called to promote beautiful, great and bold initiatives. But its first task is to make unity shine forth from the concord and harmony of its members.

"I, the prisoner in the Lord, implore you therefore to lead a life worthy of your vocation. Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together."

Naturally, experience shows that unity is extremely difficult to attain. Unity is continually threatened by the conflicting forces which we carry within us, that is, by the various unruly demands of our ego.

If then we want the unity of Jesus to shine in our families, in our groups, in our community, in the Church, if we want to see the fruits of Christian unity blossom in our society, we must courageously direct our lives in the opposite direction. We need, therefore, to clothe ourselves with the sentiments of Christ the apostle refers to here.

First of all we must perform the task entrusted to us in a true spirit of service. This will call for humility on our part. Then we need to do away with any form or arrogance, bitterness or harshness. This is where meekness comes in. Finally, we should lovingly accept one another notwithstanding the differences. Here patience and mutual forebearance come into play. These virtues maintain peace among us; and peace safeguards unity.

I think that we Christians have not sufficiently experienced the advantages of our unity.

Whoever has lived it in depth knows that everything changes in life for the very reason that unity ensures the presence of Christ among us. With him and through him the impossible becomes possible.

Life is transformed into a human and divine adventure. Everything acquires meaning.

We can only hope that Christians will never trade this precious treasure for anything else in the world.

This would be for their good and the good of many, very many others.

Chiara Lubich

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers have shared with us.

"Rich in mercy...

I am a nurse on the 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. shift in a private hospital. Near the beginning of the year, the nurses who had just graduted began to work with us on the floor. One of them was assigned to work on the night shift. All realized immediately that she needed a great deal of practice and during her orientation period, everybody was very willing to help her. Once orientation had ended, however, the staff began to make complaints about her; she made many mistakes, she did not finish her work on time, and soon, until it reached the point that no one wanted to work with her. I saw that she was indeed very distracted while doing her work. Even though she had a desire to do well, she made certain mistakes that were totally inexplicable; she was very intelligent and knew the procedures to follow, but for some reason, she didn't provide the nursing care assigned for her to do.

Most of the time I am responsible for the floor and so I had a chance to talk it over with our supervisor. We decided to give her another opportunity to get more practice. This meant, however, that since no one would work with her, she was always scheduled to work with me. Each night there were many chances to live the word of life for that month: "But God loved us with so much love that he was generous with his mercy: when we were dead through our sins, he brought us to life with Christ" (Eph. 2:4-5). The commentary said: "During his life on earth, Jesus showed us what it is to love continually and unselfishly, to be always the first to love, to love all without distinction, preferring the "least"... his love was boundless, going beyond all misunderstandings... We, too, must act this way, convinced that we must be the first to love and take the initiative in every situation... Maybe we have the impression that with a certain person, a colleague at work for example... there's no hope... It is precisely in these moments that we should remember this word of life: to love all, to be the first to love and, to be rich in mercy because God is merciful."

I decided that each night before we began work, we could go over, step by step, all the tasks that she had to do. I thought that this might help her schedule her time, but still she was unable to stick to the schedule and therefore I found many things left undone, or done too late. In these cases I would try to jump in and do them. Sometimes I would get nervous because many of these procedures were very important, but inside of me I felt that I had to continue loving.

It reached such a point that some nights I ended up doing most of *her* work, too. One night was unforgettable. Each one of us had to take care of half the patients on the floor. During the night I realized that I was really running because I was taking care of practically all the patients. I almost wanted to say, "No! This is enough!" But then I remembered the sentence from the Gospel, "If somebody asks you to go one mile, go with them two..." I went ahead giving medications, answering the call lights, turning patients, changing the dressings.

Little by little a relationship started to develop between us. She became more acquainted with the responsibilities and I found that I could trust her more and more. She was actually doing the jobs that she was supposed to do.

One night during a rare lull, she began to tell me more about her life. She was expecting a baby. She had just discovered that her husband was alcoholic and, she was thinking of getting a separation. She also mentioned that she had never told anybody all this before.

After hearing her story, I was glad I had not given up on her. I realized, too, how important it was for her to keep the job so that she would be able to support the baby. I tried to share with her some of my own experiences, encouraging her not to give up. I mentioned also the different possibilities open to help alcoholics.

Not long afterwards, she came to work very happy. She had decided to stay with her husband, and her husband had agreed to go to a program for alcoholics. I shared with her the experience of a friend who is an alcoholic and how she had begun a new life after she had re-discovered God. She answered that she too had been thinking about God lately and wanted to go back to Church again, the first time since she was a child.

G.L.

Small changes, big results

I had just returned from a gathering at a friend's house where we had met to share our experiences of trying to put the word of life into practice. In hearing what the others said I realized that there was one relationship in my life that I had not yet had the courage to try and transform with the spirit of the Gospel and that was with my mother-in-law.

So far I had only managed to put up with her because many little things she did annoyed me. Instead, I realized that here was the perfect chance to live that phrase, "For the weak I made myself weak, I made myself all things to all men in order to save some at any cost" (1 Cor. 9:22), and that there were many opportunities to do so.

For one thing, she loves to play Yahtzee and enjoys coming to our home because I always play with her. Sometimes I get tired, however, and I don't like to play quite as often as she does. One afternoon we were together and I thought to myself, "Any minute now she's going to ask me to play Yahtzee." Then I realized that in order to love her I could be the one to ask her to play. Was I surprised when she responded, "I wasn't going to ask you because I thought you were getting tired of it!" I think we played the best game of our lives because finally it seemed we were playing "together," and after that I no longer resented playing.

I've always been irked by the way my mother-in-law chops up fresh green beans. I prefer them in larger pieces. One day, I had the opportunity to prepare the beans for dinner and I thought to myself, "Now I can do them the way I want to do them!" Then it came to me that it was another opportunity to "make myself one" and cut the beans the way I know she likes them. Even my daughter noticed I was cutting them differently than usual. My reward was knowing I had done this out of love.

One evening I volunteered to drive to the library for my husband. At the time I thought it would be an opportunity to be out alone after being in the house all day with my mother-in-law. But maybe she would like to be out of the house, too. When I asked her she said that maybe she wouldn't be allowed into the library without a card. I could have let the matter drop there but instead I went to call to be sure that she could get in. She happily agreed to come and the time we spent together in the car was really pleasant.

In the time that my in-laws were with us a unity had been built making our relationship better than it had ever been. I discovered such a change in myself and I saw that it is possible to build bridges even where I would think it impossible.

C.K.

In the light of the present moment

Maria Caampued

"Small things, no matter how small they may be can have a powerful impact, so long as they are imprinted with love."

On May 30, Rosa held a Focolare meeting in her parish. It was attended by a group of Spanish-speaking parishioners who wanted to know more about the Movement.

Although as a teacher Rosa was accustomed to speaking before large groups, she found herself somewhat nervous before this particular meeting. *"I said a silent prayer before beginning,"* she wrote later, *"because I needed light to do the will of God in the present moment."* The meeting went well. Rosa spoke about giving God the first place in one's life, and then went on to tell about the presence of Jesus in our neighbor. *"This seemed to me the key that opened everyone's heart,"* she later told her friends at the Focolare.

Towards the end of the school year Rosa recorded in her diary one morning the schedule she intended to follow that day: Mass, house-cleaning, meditation, writing, classes, exam preparation, the visit to the doctor... *"These are my plans,"* she concluded. *"What might God's be?"*

Rosa looked on her job as an opportunity to meet and love Jesus in her pupils and colleagues. One afternoon she noted, *"Today was special. Out of love for Jesus, I decided to spend the entire school day helping the students who are having difficulty in my classes. I asked Jesus to help me to love all of them in a supernatural way.*

"The last month of the school year: Exams, reports and, final-

ly, yesterday, the last day!" Rosa wrote in June. "*Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Mary! You let me finish this year. At the beginning I was asking myself, 'Will I make it?' Today I have the answer, 'Yes, it's finished'.*" *Thank you Jesus for this and for so many other things.*"

One wonders whether Rosa sensed by then that this would have been her last year of teaching. "*I place myself in your will,*" she tells Jesus. "*What will become of me? Have pity on me, Lord. You know what I need.*"

After school let out Rosa had more time to devote to the Focolare Movement. She tried to go to the Focolare Center as often as possible. "*Yesterday I went to the Focolare and listened to a tape of Chiara speaking about the vocation of the married focolarini,*"[1] she wrote at this time. "*I have the impression that my soul has acquired a new dimension as a result... What was it that made Jesus choose me?*"

The idea of the vocation kept coming back to her mind in the days which followed. "*I am a married focolarina, a person called by God,*" she wrote. "This wasn't a decision based on emotions. Everything happened tranquilly, in a way that was truly beautiful. His will for me is to belong to the Focolare. This vocation is the most beautiful thing God has ever given me, along with his love and an abundance of graces, among them the suffering which brings me ever closer to him."

These summer months were a time of great discomfort for Rosa. For one thing, there was the overwhelming heat which made her ever-present fatigue all the more intense. And in addition, the pain brought on by her illness was becoming more constant and more severe. Rosa made another appointment with her doctor, and while waiting for the day of the check-up, concentrated on living out her Ideal. "*Each moment I become more aware, my God, that if I want to truly be your little instrument, I must die,*" she told Jesus. "*I must die to everything in this world so that you can live in me.*"

After giving her a thorough examination and running some tests, Rosa's doctor concluded that the acute pain she had been experiencing almost daily was caused by gallstones. He scheduled an operation for early September. Rosa went to surgery with great peace and serenity in her soul, but in the course of the operation, the doctors made an unexpected discovery: The problem was not gallstones after all; the cancer had spread to a vital organ.

Unable to remove all of the cancer because of its sensitive location, the surgeons had to end the operation and hope for the best. Rosa was told that she would live only a short time. She accepted this news as another aspect of Jesus Forsaken, the one whom she wanted to embrace with her whole heart and soul. Loving him, she remained peaceful. It gave her joy to know that her Spouse would be with her from then on in an always more tangible way.

"*Do not fear Rosa*"

A few weeks after Rosa had shared the news of her condition with her friends at the Focolare she received the following letter from Chiara Lubich:

Mollens, Switzerland
September 22, 1971

Dear Rosa,

Before anything else, I wish to send you all my love and my best wishes from Switzerland where I will be for some time.

Giosi[2] *told me that a new will of God has been shown to you and that you have received it like a real focolarina.*

Dear Rosa, what can I tell you? I can only envy you. For you, it seems, the Spouse has solemnly arrived.

All this summer I have been meditating on the mystery of Jesus Crucified and Forsaken.

I have seen: I have understood: I have touched with my own hands, that the one who is visited by the cross is truly privileged.

St. Augustine has strong words for those who do not understand the value of the cross.

And, dear Rosa, it has to be like this. Jesus did not chose any other way to accomplish

his work. So neither can you, as a focolarina, choose other ways than this.

My advice is that you take full advantage of these moments. Live the present moment with solemnity. Mary will see what you are doing and make note of it in the book of your life.

And do not fear for yourself or for those who are dear to you. We know only today's worry; we don't know what tomorrow's worries will be. Today's worry is not tomorrow's and very often the future shows that today's worry was unfounded.

Fully embrace what God wants of you, whatever it may be. It is the means for your sanctification. I want to tell you again that I am very near to you, and that it is people like you who carry ahead the Movement.

These are words without rhetoric. They are not mere words of consolation but are words of pure truth.

Good bye Rosa. Greet everyone there who is living our Ideal.

Tell them that only one thing matters: to love Jesus Forsaken.

Chiara

Rosa was visited daily at the hospital by the focolarine, and when she returned home they were always by her side. Loretta recalls:

"After Rosa's hospitalization, it was decided that it would be good for one of us to be with her, helping her in practical matters with the family, but even more importantly, being her link with the Focolare and keeping Jesus in the midst, since once again she was confined to the house.

"She hated to take medicine, even an aspirin," Loretta recalls. "I remember one day when she had some new medication. She was sitting at the table, looking at these big tablets in her hand, and saying, 'Oh, how I hate to take this.'

"But then she just popped them into her mouth saying, 'But, for the glory of God...' "

No matter how sick she felt, Rosa tried to hide her pain from her sons. She wanted them to see only her smile, the joy that came from doing God's will. However, one by one, the boys became aware of the extreme seriousness of her condition. Eddie, the youngest, was the last to know. "I used to sleep in the room next to hers," he says, "and I remember that one night, about a year before her death, I heard her crying. I could tell that she was in acute pain. I think that was the first time I realized how sick she was."

On December 1st, Rosa wrote in her diary: *"Today I look through the window of my life. I see caravans passing and let them go on by... I see each person, each life, as a caravan of small actions that give glory to God. Small things, no matter how small they may be, can have a powerful impact, so long as they are imprinted with love, or with suffering transformed into love."*

While resting at home, Rosa tried to make her every action a hymn of love to God. *"Not even a smile, even one that isn't acknowledged here on earth, will be lost,"* she reminded herself. *"It will go to heaven and an angel of the Lord will take it and offer it to him, to the recipient of every act of love, big or small."*

Rosa spent Christmas day with her sons. She wanted it to be a happy occasion for them, and so she tried to keep her illness in the background.

"It was simple and beautiful," she recalls. *"For my part, I lived each present moment. Once in a while, a thought such as, 'This might be my last Christmas with them.' would strike me, but there was no sadness. I experienced the joy of that moment, with tremendous trust in Jesus, surrendering to his will."*

As the New Year began, Rosa reflected on the time which had gone by since her operation in September and the news that her cancer had spread. *"Only you know, Jesus what these last months have been for me. The experiences I have lived during this time are imprinted with fire in the depth of my being. Who could ever describe them? There is one thing I can surely say: You have given direction to my life forever. Now I have only to live each present moment without* ►

desiring anything other than to do your will. Give me the grace to know and do your will. Let me walk in your light, that the light and the graces of these last months may live on in my heart, and forever enlighten my way."

It will be sometime this year

Rosa knew by now just how short a time was remaining for her in this life. On January 3rd, she wrote: *"It will be sometime this year, Jesus. I ask of you only one thing: Give me strength, graces, light, humility, perseverance, hope, faith, love, fire, fire, fire—the fire of your Love..."*

She wanted all those who passed by her to find only that love, his love, in her heart and on her countenance. *"I am very sad this morning, Jesus,"* she wrote that same month. *"Let this sadness be a secret between you and me. Let me show the world only the peace and joy that you and you alone can give."*

As always, Rosa's encounters with the friends who shared her Ideal were like a divine oasis in the midst of otherwise troubled days. *"What a joy the Lord had in store for me!"* She wrote one evening. *"Last night Martha came. We were united. There was Jesus in our midst. What joy I felt in my soul even after she had left!"*

That same night Rosa wrote a brief letter to Martha. It said in part: *"After your visit I washed the dishes as though it were the most wonderful job in the world. I even scrubbed the pots and pans and the big things I can't usually lift. It was incredible. All the pain, everything, seemed to have vanished in that beautiful and profound atmosphere that supernatural love engenders."*

Prayer

You know, Lord
how long
the night of suffering
has been.
Please caress my soul
with the delicate light
of dawn;
and lift the yoke
which still weighs me down
relentlessly!
You, my joy.

You, my all!
May this struggle
with my human
failings
become—through faith
—my protective shield.
And may flowers blossom
in the garden of my heart.
Petals scented by prayer.
May they unite me
to You.

"From day to day"

On a wintry Sunday afternoon, Rosa sat down for a few minutes to write about the day's happenings. Nothing momentous had taken place, but the simple experiences she describes present a vivid picture of how she tried to live from day to day.

"I returned from church at noon to meet with trials here at home—disunity among the boys. Not one of them wants to admit that the other might be right. Lord, have mercy! Now they've all gone out, and I'm alone with you Lord, keeping me company."

On the night of February 11th, Rosa lay awake for many hours, exhausted and yet unable to sleep. She offered her insomnia for someone who might be suffering at that moment; in the morning she learned that a close friend of hers had died at 1:00 a.m.

"I wanted to place my plants by the window so that they could get some sun. The carriage bumped into something and the plants went all over the floor. I loved Jesus very much in that moment. Patiently, I cleaned everything up and transplanted one of them that was almost dying. I experienced great joy.

"My health seems to be improving. I might just be gaining a little strength to face what will come—an agony of suffering. Jesus, be with me always. With you at my side, everything will be all right. I will have strength in you.

"I think also of that death which must come before my physical death: death to myself. Jesus, teach me to die, to die every moment, to die with you in each suffering, always with the conviction that you have already suffered for me, for all my suffering, there on the cross.

"My thoughts stray from the present moment, and the things at hand, to the suffering my relatives will experience when I die. Jesus, you yourself take care of everything. I know you will.

"I am aware of the fact that I have to build up strength in the present moment because big physical sufferings must be on their way already. And since I have offered everything I feel that it all has to be a complete act of love. How much I need that conversion and reconversion."□

To be continued.

1) See inside back cover; 2) Giosi Guella was responsible for the women's branch of the Focolare Movement in North America at that time.

Images FOR words

United Nations/M.Tzovaras

"Every believer in this world must be a spark of light,
a center of love, a life-giving ferment among the masses."

POPE JOHN XXIII

(Continued from page 13)

people, and my faith in their ability to develop this good.

I then began a vast project to make the people aware of the importance of using natural methods for family planning, helping them to find information.

Some months later that same doctor came to visit me. She had come to apologize for the rude attitude she had assumed with me. She told me that she had been impressed by my courage and firmness in handling the issue, and that the situation had forced her to do further studies on natural methods of birth control. Doing this she had discovered that these methods not only protect the woman's health but they also help the relationship of the couple because the effective use of these methods requires the participation of both the husband and wife, fostering a deeper respect and openness to life between them and a greater sense of responsibility. "Only in this way," the doctor confided to me, "will the family enjoy its true freedom and fulfill its true function in society."

Often times I have been criticized for my "honesty", particularly since I insist on making public the financial report of the town. Everything is done in the open. All are encouraged to offer their comments and ideas, and they have the opportunity to do so as I stand on top of a truck and use a microphone to read the financial statement once a week in the town square.

In the same way I also report the criticisms I have received and I explain the reason for my actions. I know that I'm risking my life and sometimes I am afraid, but for my people's sake I cannot silence the truth. The people do respond on these occasions, offering their opinions, and this is very important.

The drought and other natural disasters are generating terrible effects on the population, but we have seen that it forces us to do without luxury items and to use the natural resources we have on the land, staying on the farm instead of migrating to the cities where the problems are only multiplied.

For my part I felt I had to give away many of my things to the poor, keeping only what was absolutely necessary, and then sharing even that. Could this be mere paternalism? I don't know... but, whenever I see a poor person I really can't help giving him or her what I have in my pocket for "In so far as you did this to the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Mt. 25:40).

Last year we went through a very difficult period. The drought had been causing serious problems. Government agencies were not able to cope. As things became worse, we, the mayors of the zones, went to speak to the governor to appeal for a solution to this problem.

As we were waiting outside his office for a hearing I had an idea which I voiced to all my fellow mayors. "If the problem is ours," I said, "why don't *we* start by making a contribution?" And I suggested that each one of us give twenty percent of his or her income.

I never thought this idea would cause such a reaction... The newspapers and television caught wind of my idea and interviewed me. It was now impossible for the other mayors not to go along with this proposal.

With the amount collected in my area it was possible to give aid to sixty families who lived in poverty. Later on, new laws were passed enabling us to give work to more than two hundred people thereby relieving many of the poorest families.

Even though I have always been a Christian, I must say that I really never prayed as much as I do now that I am mayor. I feel small and limited in the face of so many problems and the only thing I can do is ask Almighty God to help me. After Mass each morning, I remain at length in front of the Eucharist but I leave the church with the trust and courage I need to continue my mission to be, following Jesus' example, the servant of all.

L.B.

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What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

FOCOLARE ADDRESSES IN NORTH AMERICA

CHICAGO:
P.O. Box 53426
Chicago, IL 60653

SAN ANTONIO:
P.O. Box 32302
San Antonio. TX 78216

NEW YORK:
P.O. Box 496
New York, NY 10021

BOSTON:
P.O. Box 239
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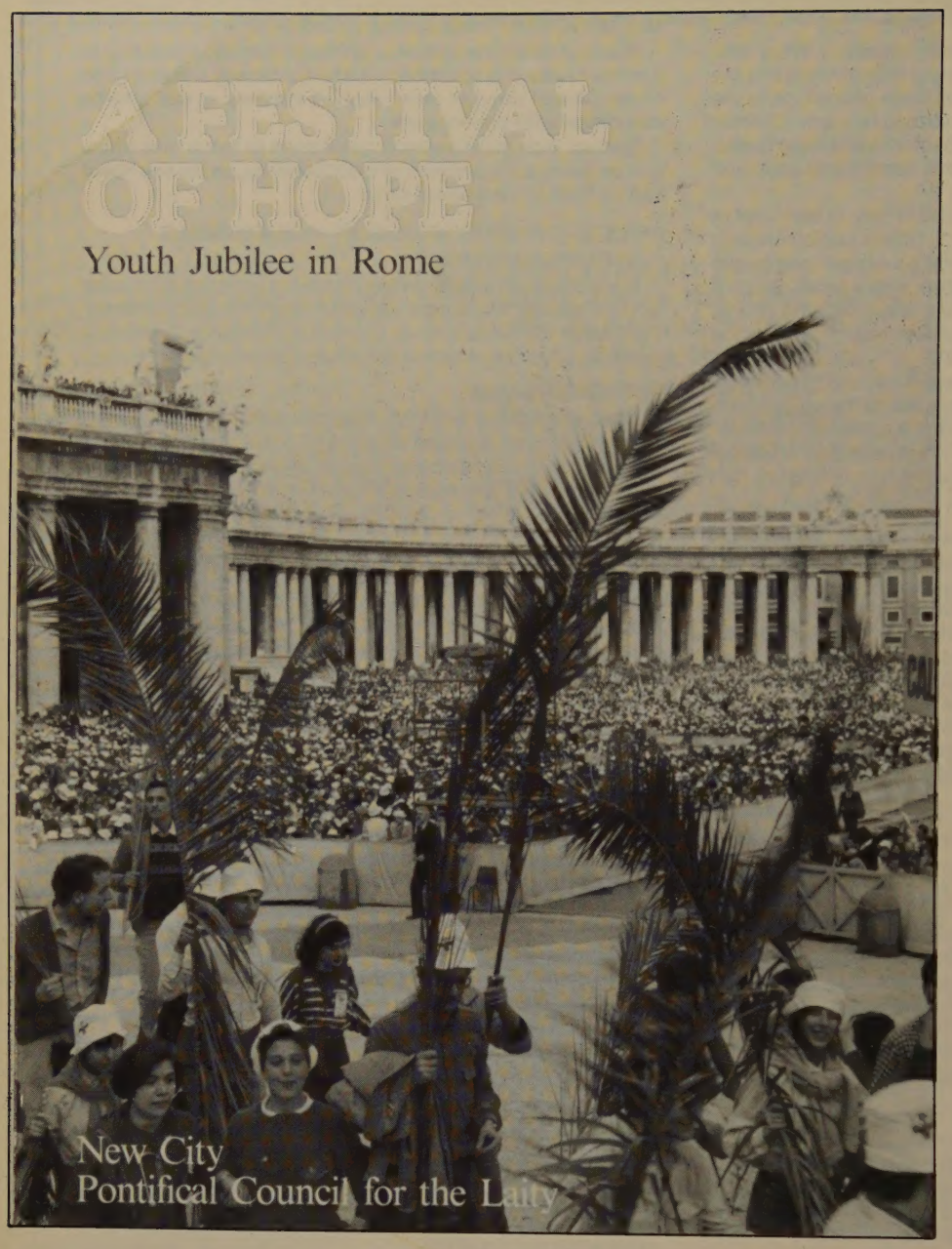

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